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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHACIN DEFENDS CHAVEZ FROM FARC LINKS

Classified By: Daniel Lawton, Acting Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV) Minister of Justice Ramon Rodriguez Chacin, during a May 20 interview, sought to protect President Hugo Chavez from incriminating computer files linking him with the FARC. Chacin announced Chavez "had no direct relation" with the FARC and what contact there was, came about as part of the Colombian-authorized facilitation of hostage releases. Chacin repeated his earlier assertion that he had met with all members of the FARC secretariat as part of the BRV's hostage release efforts. Chacin seems to be putting himself between Chavez and the FARC to head off any embarrassing revelations from the authenticated hard drives. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During an exclusive May 20 interview on the BRV funded satellite news channel TeleSUR, Chacin claimed that Chavez' only contact with the FARC, such as the November 2007 meeting with FARC representative Ivan Marquez and Colombian senator Piedad Cordoba, was at the direction of the GOC "as part of the peace process." Chacin said all other FARC contact "had been through me." The Minister explained that "to get those releases it was necessary to have contacts," adding, "they weren't coming to me, I had to go look for them."

¶3. (SBU) Earlier in a May 11 press conference, Chacin admitted to twice meeting the FARC secretariat, seven members. "Of course I know Ivan Marquez. I know the FARC secretariat, all of them, from Marulanda on down," said Chacin. The Minister also confirmed that he had met with ELN leaders Antonio Garcia and Nicolas Rodriguez Bautista.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: An unswervingly loyal Chavista, Chacin is clearly trying to distance Chavez from any damaging revelations from Raul Reyes' data files. Two admissions to meeting the FARC secretariat within 10 days suggest Chacin thinks it is likely the FARC computer archives will show he held meetings with the guerrillas. The fact that the interview was with TeleSUR indicates that the intended audience was other South American countries where Chavez appears particularly interested in doing damage control and shoring up Latin American credentials. End Comment.

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